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Editorial: Let's talk about sex

Indiana's higher-than-average teen pregnancy rate shouldn't be a partisan issue. At least that's what two state senators, Sen. Jean Breaux, D-Indianapolis, and Sen. Jean Leising, R-Oldenburg, believe.

"On [Feb. 18], they labored to advance a bill that would have compelled the state departments of health and education to work together to determine what students are being taught about sex in their health classes," reported our Statehouse bureau chief Maureen Hayden in a story we published Feb. 20. "The legislation, however, failed to pass out of committee after it met steep opposition from social conservatives — even after its original language was amended to replace the phrase 'sex education' and the broader concept of health and wellness was included. ... The bill was shot down in a 7-4 vote by the Senate Education Committee after lobbyists with conservative faith-based organizations, including Advance America and the Indiana Family Institute, decried their bill."

But why the backlash? You see, the current curriculum approved for use requires an abstinence-only stance when it comes to sex outside of marriage. Critics of this bill balked at any move away from this policy. This,

despite clear evidence of its continued failure to produce measurable results.

“[Breaux and Leising looked] at numbers showing a decline in teen birth rates since 2007, both nationally and at the state level, but Indiana’s drop was slower,” reported Hayden. “As of 2012 – the most-recent year for which data is available – Indiana’s rate of 33 births per 1,000 teenagers was higher than that of all its neighboring states, except Kentucky.”

But the impact of this foolhardy stubbornness doesn’t simply end with teen pregnancy, but extends to rape as well.

“A national analysis of sexual violence by the Centers for Disease Control found 15 percent of high school-age females in Indiana reported having forced sexual intercourse in 2009,” read our editorial from Feb. 19. “It was the second-highest percentage in the nation and 3 percentage points higher than the rest of the country. The CDC says the percentage of Indiana girls who were raped or sexually assaulted is now 17.3 percent — two-thirds higher than the national average.”

Clearly, our policy of just say no isn’t cutting it for our young people, especially our girls who are becoming pregnant and suffering sexual violence at much higher rates than most of the rest of the nation. These numbers are an embarrassment and cry out for an instant course

correction. Education and understanding is the only way out of this mess,
not another helping of ignorance.